

DOE/HR-0167

Your Records Management Responsibilities

U.S. Department of Energy

❖ INTRODUCTION

The Federal Records Act, a part of the United States Code (54 U.S.C. 3301), requires all Federal agencies to adequately document their functions, policies, procedures, and to preserve their historical records. The National Archives and Records Administration and the Office of Management and Budget, as well as the individual Federal Agencies, share oversight of the Federal Records Management Programs. The purpose of this Program and the responsibilities of each employee.

As defined in 44 U.S.C. 3301, the term record includes: all books, papers, maps, photographs, machine-readable materials, or other documentary materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received by an agency of the United States Government under Federal law or in connection with the transaction of public business and preserved or appropriate for preservation by that agency or its legitimate successor as evidence of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations or other activities of the Government or because of the informational value of the data in them.

❖ WHAT ARE FEDERAL RECORDS?

As defined by law, Federal records are those documents, regardless of physical form or medium, that meet the following two conditions:

(1) made or received by an agency of the United States Government under Federal law or in connection with the transaction of public business and are under the control of the Federal Government

(2) preserved or appropriate for preservation by that agency or its legitimate successor as evidence of agency activities or decisions or because of their informational value

Simply stated, a record is any document, regardless of form, that is created, received, or used in the course of the work of your office – regardless of how the information was recorded or the form and may include paper, electronic, or other media.

memoranda, completed forms, directives, reports, and other media such as photographs, maps, microforms, motion pictures, computer tapes and disks, and e-mail messages. With few exceptions and regardless of media, records created or received by contractors are also Federal records and are subject to Government regulations.

Determining whether a particular document is a record does not depend on whether it is an original or a copy. Multiple copies of the same document may each have record status if they serve a separate function and are controlled under different files or filing systems.

❖ WHY DO WE NEED RECORDS?

It's the law! Federal laws require that agencies create and maintain adequate documentation and make it a crime to destroy records without approval from the National Archives.

Complete and accurate records are needed to:

- (1) protect the legal and financial rights of the Government and anyone directly affected by the Department;
- (2) ensure continuity and consistency in administration;
- (3) assist officials and their successors in making informed decisions; and
- (4) provide information required by Congress and agencies which perform oversight functions.

Proper documentation is also a good business practice! By creating and maintaining records appropriately, we are able

to:

- (1) reconstruct the development of our own and our predecessors' policies and decisions;
- (2) furnish successors with the information needed to understand current and past actions; and
- (3) leave an enduring record of our public service.

Records are necessary to keep you and others informed – now and in the future. Consider the letters, reports, and briefing materials that you have produced over the years. Not many of us think about our records until there is a significant need, such as an audit or a lawsuit. The work you perform as a Government or contractor employee is important! Acknowledge that fact by creating and maintaining appropriate records to ensure that a history of your work is available to you and others.

❖ WHAT ARE YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES?

Simply stated, you have two basic obligations regarding records:

- (1) To create records that you and others need to do business.
- (2) To take care of your records so that they can be retrieved when needed.

This means that you must create records that adequately document your activities, index them accurately, and maintain them properly. Break the extra copy habit. It is costly to make and keep duplicate records.

Learn how and where records are kept. Filing regularly and

carefully is as important as anything else you do. Don't leave records stacked on your desk or a convenient shelf. If you keep records in your own office, make sure they are filed correctly so they can be retrieved in an efficient manner.

Electronic data and e-mail messages are Federal records also. Ensure that electronic records are indexed properly and backed up so that they are accessible. Remember to label diskettes.

When records are consulted infrequently (several times a year or less) they have become inactive and should be moved to a records storage area. The indiscriminate weeding of records and/or files is an improper records management practice and the unauthorized destruction of records is prohibited by law. Refer to approved records disposition schedules for specific instructions on when and how to dispose of your records. If you are uncertain of how long a record must be retained, consult your Records Manager or the Departmental Records Officer.

If records are stored in your desk, office, or computer when you change jobs or leave the Department, ask your supervisor to designate a custodian for them. Like the office furniture, records are Government property!

❖ WHAT ARE THE REWARDS?

Using records management principles can produce cost savings, greater productivity, and efficiency for you and the Department. You will spend less time looking for misplaced documents and have fewer files to maintain. Some of the records you create may even become part of the permanent records preserved at the National Archives. These records will help future generations understand how our Government

works and learn about our lives

❖ ENCOURAGE RECORD

Significant decisions are often made in conferences or meetings. Summarize deliberations leading up to the decision. Make them appropriate and practical, be done and put into official files.

Debriefing of staff is an important part of the work of the Department. It should be performed to capture significant information from conferences, technical projects, and other special assignments. Because of the time and effort elsewhere, steps should be taken to ensure that information gained from debriefing is used for the mission of the program, research, or information gained, and the results of the debriefing process should capture the mission accomplishment and its historical significance.

Some organizations produce summaries of their decisions and history of their projects. Summaries can be helpful but are not a requirement that each employee produce proper documentation.

❖ ALL RECORDS HAVE VALUE

Records have either temporary or permanent value.

Permanent records have historical or other value that warrants continuous preservation by the Federal Government. Temporary records have limited retention periods and may be destroyed in accordance with established procedures and with appropriate approval.

The Archivist of the United States has sole approval authority for the disposition of Federal records. Records disposition schedules are developed by DOE Records Managers, in conjunction with expert personnel familiar with the records. Upon review and concurrence by the Departmental Records Officer, the proposed schedules are submitted to the National Archives and Records Administration for approval. Approved schedules may be found in the General Records Schedules and the DOE Records Schedules.

All unscheduled records should be considered permanent until disposition schedules have been approved. Records must not be destroyed until their retention period has elapsed. Even then, a moratorium may prevent immediate destruction. Consult your Records Manager or the Departmental Records Officer before disposing of records.

❖ WHAT ARE PERSONAL PAPERS?

Some documentary materials do not qualify as Federal records. These materials may be considered personal papers (or private property) if they relate only to your personal affairs and do not affect agency business. Examples include:

(1) papers accumulated by an official before joining Government service;

(2) materials relating solely to an individual's private affairs, such as professional affiliations, and private or

political associations;

(3) books, diaries, and papers prepared or received in the performance of Government business.

Extra copies of documents may be made for personal reference when warranted by the distinction of the position held, the historical significance of the research, or the need for the documents. These documents are considered more valuable than personal papers. Such copies should be made at the time of document origination and retention. Please note that nonrecord materials may be removed from the Department without prior approval of the Records Manager or Departmental Records Officer.

Personal papers, nonrecord materials, and agency business papers should not be filed in the same system. If you must extract or copy the part relating to agency business, the extraction should be maintained in a separate location.

❖ YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU

Federal records may not be removed from the custody of the Government under any circumstances from the custody of the Government. The maximum penalty for unauthorized removal, mutilation, or destruction of any Federal record is a fine, imprisonment, or both (5 U.S.C. 2071).

❖ FURTHER ASSISTANCE

For assistance with records identification, recordkeeping requirements, permanent records, personal papers, records disposition schedules and additional information regarding the Records Management Program, please contact the Records Manager in your organization or the Departmental Records Officer, Office of Information Management.

❖ LAWS

The Federal Records Act of 1950, as amended
(codified at Chapters 21, 29, 31, and 33 of Title 44 of the U.S.C.)

The Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995
(codified at Chapter 35 of Title 44 of the U.S.C.)

Information Technology Management Reform Act of 1996
(Public Law 104-106)

❖ REGULATIONS

National Archives and Records Administration:
(Chapter XII, (Subchapter B) of Title 36 of the U.S.C.)